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PRESS FREEDOM WINS AT UNESCO--FOR NOW

ANNCR: A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF DELEGATIONS TO THE CURRENT U.N. EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION CONFERENCE AT NAIROBI HAS TURNED ASIDE A THREAT TO WORLD PRESS FREEDOM. NEWS ANALYST FRED GALVAN HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE: A CONSENSUS OF WESTERN AND THIRD WORLD DELEGATIONS TURNED BACK A SOVIET-SPONSORED MOVE THAT WOULD PUT ALL NEWS MEDIA UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROLS. BUT WHILE THE VERBAL BATTLE WAS WON AFTER DAYS OF DEBATE, THE STRUGGLE PRESUMABLY COULD BE JOINED AGAIN AT UNESCO'S NEXT BIENNIAL CONFERENCE, AND AT OTHER INTERNATIONAL GATHERINGS. THE VOTE AGAINST THE SOVIET-INSPIRED DRAFT DECLARATION WAS OVERWHELMING--SEVENTY-EIGHT DELEGATIONS VOTED FOR SENDING IT BACK TO A DRAFTING AND NEGOTIATING GROUP WHILE ONLY FIFTEEN VOTED IN FAVOR OF APPROVAL NOW.

THE MAJORITY PARTICULARLY OBJECTED TO A PROVISION OF THE SOVIET DRAFT THAT WOULD HAVE MADE GOVERNMENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF MASS MEDIA OPERATING WITHIN THEIR BORDERS. WEST EUROPEAN, AMERICAN, LATIN AMERICAN, ASIAN AND AFRICAN OPPONENTS OF THE DRAFT DECLARATION SAW IN IT A THREAT TO THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION--A CONCEPT UNESCO IS COMMITTED TO UPHOLD. THE WEST EUROPEANS AND AMERICANS PARTICULARLY ARGUED THAT ANY SUCH PROVISION WOULD BE CONTRARY TO THEIR CONSTITUTIONAL LAWS WHICH GUARANTEE FREEDOM OF OPINION AND THE PRESS. (OPT) THE WESTERN DELEGATIONS AND OTHERS WERE SUPPORTED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THEIR COMMERCIAL MEDIA AND--IN SOME CASES--THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED NEWS AGENCIES WHICH EXIST SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH THE

INDEPENDENT PRESS. (END OPT)

BOTH THE WESTERN AND THIRD WORLD OPPONENTS OF THE COMMUNIST-BACKED DECLARATION DENOUNCED IT AS THREATENING A COLLAPSE OF UNESCO OR A FURTHER DISTORTION OF ITS NON-POLITICAL AIMS. THESE DELEGATIONS WERE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO THE CONCERN REFLECTED BY THE AMERICAN AND WESTERN MEDIA. THE INFLUENCE OF THE AMERICAN PRESS AND BROADCASTING IN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE IS WELL-KNOWN.

BUT WHILE REJECTION OF THE SOVIET MOVE WAS WELCOMED THERE IS ALSO RECOGNITION THAT THE ISSUE IS LIKELY TO COME UP AGAIN.

THE VOTING FRIDAY IN NAIROBI MERELY POSTPONES DECISION ON THE MATTER. WHAT FORM A REVISED DECLARATION ON MASS MEDIA WILL TAKE NOW DEPENDS ON THE DRAFTING AND NEGOTIATING BODY WHICH WILL HAVE TO GO TO WORK ON THE ORIGINAL SOVIET PROPOSAL.

BUT SEVERAL DELEGATES IN NAIROBI WARNED THAT SOME NATIONS WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO USE UNESCO FOR THEIR OWN POLITICAL ENDS, DESPITE THE FACT THAT RESTRICTIONS SUCH AS STATE CONTROL OF THE PRESS ARE CONTRARY TO THE UNESCO CHARTER AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

PCH/FFG/GH